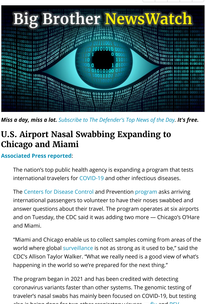
DEFENDER NEWSWATCH

U.S. Airport Nasal Swabbing Expanding to Chicago and Miami + More

The Defender's Big Brother NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to governments' abuse of power, including attacks on democracy, civil liberties and use of mass surveillance. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff



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U.S. Airport Nasal Swabbing Expanding to Chicago and Miami

Associated Press reported:

The nation's top public health agency is expanding a program that tests international travelers for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention program asks arriving international passengers to volunteer to have their noses swabbed and answer questions about their travel. The program operates at six airports and on Tuesday, the CDC said it was adding two more — Chicago's O'Hare and Miami.

"Miami and Chicago enable us to collect samples coming from areas of the world where global surveillance is not as strong as it used to be," said the CDC's Allison Taylor Walker. "What we really need is a good view of what's happening in the world so we're prepared for the next thing."

The program began in 2021 and has been credited with detecting coronavirus variants faster than other systems. The genomic testing of traveler's nasal swabs has mainly been focused on COVID-19, but testing also is being done for two other respiratory viruses — flu and RSV.

Participants are not notified of their results. But they are given a COVID-19 home test kit to take with them, CDC officials say. Samples have come from more than 475,000 air travelers coming off flights from more than 135 countries, officials said.

FTC Can Reopen Meta Privacy Case Despite $5 Billion Fine, Court Rules

Reuters reported:

Meta (META.O) cannot stop the U.S. Federal Trade Commission from reopening a probe into its Facebook unit's privacy practices for now, a U.S. appeals court ruled, despite Meta's objections that it already paid a $5 billion fine and agreed to a range of changes to settle the case.

The FTC wants to tighten an existing 2020 Facebook privacy settlement to ban profiling from minors' data and expand curbs on facial recognition technology. The agency has accused Meta of misleading parents about protections for children.

The decision late on Tuesday from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit was a setback for Meta, which had asked the court to freeze the FTC case while it pursues a separate lawsuit challenging the FTC's inquiry on constitutional grounds.

Meta and other social media companies are separately fighting hundreds of U.S. lawsuits accusing them of addicting children to their platforms. The FTC is also suing Meta for allegedly monopolizing the personal social network market. Meta has denied the allegations.

Latest Draft WHO Amendments to International Health Regulations Still Contain References to Power Over 'Misinformation,' Vaccine Passports

Reclaim the Net reported:

The UN's World Health Organization (WHO) has been toiling away in relative obscurity for decades, but it was the pandemic that really brought it to the fore.

Is WHO a benevolent international promoter of health and safety and in particular when it comes to the most vulnerable categories of population worldwide? Or is it yet another globalist group bent on serious "power grab" — robbing national authorities of agency in this particularly sensitive sector?

Some actions, such as a number of provisions contained in the effort to amend the 2005 International Health Regulations (IHR), have given pause even to those who may not bill themselves as being against globalization. That's because WHO attempted to wade in on issues like misinformation, disinformation, vaccine passports, and all this in the context of expanding its own related powers.

Now, observers say that the latest draft of these amendments seems to have toned things down a little, but continues to provide for WHO's expanded powers along the said lines. Under the amendments, anyone who refuses to be examined or vaccinated can be denied entry into a county.

Your Car Might Be Secretly Recording Your Driving Habits and Sending the Data to Your Insurance Company: Report

Benzinga reported:

The driving data of millions of Americans is being shared with insurance companies by automakers and data brokers, leading to increased insurance premiums for some drivers.

What Happened: Internet-connected vehicles, including the Chevrolet Bolt, are capable of tracking driving patterns such as hard braking and rapid accelerations. This data is then sent to LexisNexis, a data broker that collaborates with insurance companies to create personalized coverage, reported The New York Times.

Kenn Dahl, a Chevrolet Bolt owner discovered a 258-page report on his driving habits after questioning a 21% increase in his insurance costs. Other owners shared similar experiences of increased insurance costs, with insurance companies advising them to review their LexisNexis reports.

Why It Matters: This revelation adds to the ongoing debate on data privacy and security in the automotive industry. In April, it was reported that Tesla employees had open access to owners' built-in cameras, raising concerns about privacy.

U.S. House Passes Bill to Force ByteDance to Divest TikTok or Face Ban

Reuters reported:

The U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a bill on Wednesday that would give TikTok's Chinese owner ByteDance about six months to divest the U.S. assets of the short-video app used by about 170 million Americans or face a ban.

The bill passed 352-65, with bipartisan support, but it faces a more uncertain path in the Senate where some have a different approach to regulating foreign-owned apps that could pose security concerns. Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has not indicated how he plans to proceed.

Shortly after passage, a bipartisan pair of senators, Democrat Mark Warner and Republican Marco Rubio, issued a joint statement saying they were encouraged by the bipartisan support for the bill and that they "look forward to working together to get this bill passed through the Senate and signed into law."

Billionaire Musk Joins Trump to Denounce TikTok Ban as 'Censorship and Government Control'

Forbes reported:

Billionaire Elon Musk slammed a potential federal ban on social media app TikTok Thursday morning, claiming a congressional bill that could restrict access to the app amounts to "censorship and government control," making Musk — who owns rival social media platform X — the latest to criticize the bill, a move President Donald Trump...

In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, Musk claimed the bill "is not just about TikTok," claiming that if it were targeted at the app and its Chinese parent company ByteDance, it "would only cite 'foreign control' as the issue, but it does not."

Musk reposted a tweet from Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky. — a primary opponent of a potential ban — who claimed the ban amounts to a Trojan horse, citing a provision of the bill that punishes internet hosting services that "distribute, maintain, or update ... a foreign adversary controlled application" in the U.S.

If approved by the House and Senate and signed into law, the bill would give ByteDance six months to sell the app, or else TikTok would be banned in the U.S., though the measure has faced backlash from TikTok users and a group of politicians.

Anti-Lockdown and Vaccine Mandate Skeptic Martin Kulldorff Announces He Was 'Fired' by Harvard

Fox News reported:

Epidemiologist Martin Kulldorff, a professor of medicine at Harvard University since 2003, announced on social media Monday that he was "fired" by the university. "I am no longer a professor of medicine at Harvard," Kulldorff wrote in a lengthy essay in the City Journal, also posting the news on his X account. "The Harvard motto is Veritas, Truth. But, as I discovered, truth can get you fired."

Kulldorff was a prominent opponent of vaccine mandates and school closures during the COVID era debate about the regulation of schools and businesses. He, along with Professor Sunetra Gupta at Oxford University and Stanford's Jay Bhattacharya, released the Great Barrington Declaration in 2020, which "argue[d] for age-based focused protection instead of universal lockdowns, with specific suggestions for how better to protect the elderly, while letting children and young adults live close to normal lives."

"The declaration made clear that no scientific consensus existed for school closures and many other lockdown measures. In response, though, the attacks intensified — and even grew slanderous," Kulldorff wrote, recounting criticism against him and other professors for refusing to say that lockdown measures were a scientifically guided measure.

Kulldorff wrote that "[t]otally autonomy" was an argument against COVID vaccine mandates, calling those measures "unscientific and unethical" and restating his support for natural immunity from COVID and other diseases.

European Parliament Approves Landmark Artificial Intelligence Act

Variety reported:

The European Parliament approved on Wednesday a landmark political agreement on artificial intelligence.

The world's first major set of regulatory rules to govern artificial intelligence, the AI Act provides a legal framework for the development and use of artificial intelligence within Europe, calling for greater transparency as well as setting parameters for high-risk AI.

European Union officials had struck a provisional deal in December following 37 hours of debates. The bill divides up the technology into risk categories and highlights what is prohibited when it comes to AI, key requirements for using high-risk AI and penalties. Ultimately, the AI Act aims to balance innovation with fundamental rights.

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2 Comments

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Best Newest Oldest

Nellie 8 a month ago

Funny how all the legal international travelers have to get tested but no illegals do.

Reply

Caroline Cary Davidson a month ago

nothing like getting people to accept surrendering biometric data as a common occurrence, even somehow helpful or virtuous. the list of things you have to 'accept' just to travel is getting longer every time I turn around. heck, its been what, 20+ yrs since the absurdity of having to take one's shoes off for air travel security.

so glad I don't, and won't, travel to anywhere that I cannot drive my own vehicle. maybe people will finally wake up when restrictions on THAT begin, but it will be too late to complain by then.

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